

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON TRIPLE HELIX INTERACTIONS REPORT

Event organized in during the 7th ICEIRD Conference 2014, Nicosia, Cyprus

Panelists

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FIRST QUESTION: How the involvement of the government could assist triple helix interactions/relations?

Policy should function as an enabler to give incentives for the involved stakeholders so that we can facilitate academic-business interrelation. A good example in this case is the US model where state funds are given on a competitive mode and are matched by funds from industry. Additionally, an internal reward system for professors based on entrepreneurial activities can be introduced, however the main priority should be the employability of students. Finally, research funding should be allocated according to commercialization potential of research outputs (Kofteros). In similar lines, EU funding could follow the idea that public funding should be matched by (equal) private funding (Peroulakis).

Furthermore, there is a need to answer SME problems but there is a lack of communication between academia and SMEs and there should be coaching provided for all departments on how to commercialize research (Paraskeva).

A very specific debate with the participants concerns the liaison offices which are perceived by most of the participants as not properly working and not delivering the desired results. However, according to (Martidou), liaison offices have been established at universities and their operational efficiency is rising. Additionally, the same speaker argues that entrepreneurship & business needs must be included in academic curriculum since this is important for employability of students and private industry demands these skills.

SECOND QUESTION: How does the current/future policy specifically support university/industry collaboration?

The general view of the panelists was that triple helix collaboration is a necessity for receiving funding by achieving a balance between basic research and industry funded research. Entrepreneurialism and creativity is important in each triple helix entity and the needs of SMEs must be carefully listened to. Also, lengthy processes for project approvals must be shortened and budget incentives (such as GDP expenditure increase for R&D – which is currently very low – 0.5%) must be further developed as well as the encouragement of business angels and venture capitalists. In this matter a scientific will be created with the ratio of 3 academics / 4 business people.

A specific statement proposes that the government must act on scientific analysis. Overall, research comes as the process that transforms money into knowledge and innovation comes as the process that transforms knowledge into money. To this end, we need highly skilled people for these purposes and university cannot do both (its

primary role is to produce skilled researchers) – to this end the role of triple helix collaboration is crucial (Dikaiakos).

From all these, the most important element that the government must assure is to pay the due amounts within appropriate time limits so that the efforts of the engaged actors are capitalized (Peroulakis). Finally, the main agreement was that the governmental support should be tailored around user-centered research (Ketikidis).

THIRD QUESTION: How can you (academia) pro-actively collaborate/communicate with the industry so that your expectations from industry are met?

Good academics are necessary, good entrepreneurial academics are necessary but often, this collaboration is killed by bureaucracy and overall framework and mentality. Right channeling is needed for a good idea and to match a business man with academia. Even though business comes to academia, we have not the appropriate places/ interface to make the necessary match (Georgiou).

Alternatively, another view states that there is a mix of terms: we do not need to make academics entrepreneurs but we need implement entrepreneurial skills into them, so to enable them to identify opportunities. For this, we need different academics for different roles, the right people at the right place and time and we also need to decide which type of industry you want to be in contact: big organizations or SMEs? Both can be difficult and have advantages (Vorley).

Overall, we need companies to create this interaction between industry and academia. Cyprus does not have it. It is a small market, mostly SMEs, therefore we need to look outside of Cyprus. Also, liaison offices do not have many success stories. A good example that makes one think is Viper. Viper is a Cypriot success story, sold by 900mln., but most of its technology stems from Israel. Thus, in Cyprus, policy was good to attract funding for Viper, but this is not enough – since the actual R&D flows are in Israel.

FOURTH QUESTION: How to bridge academia to industry?

Our department has currently non-binding agreements with 15 companies to achieve this goal (however, the department has nobody particular assigned to talk to companies). Important to engage in dialogue, but dialogue needs time: Companies have their own priorities, and you need to get to know each other (Dikaiakos). Overall, it is better to change culture within university than putting pressure on academics - then it would be a no-win situation (Vorley).

FIFTH QUESTION: Should there be entrepreneurial courses also in the non-business academic curricula?

The general view on this topic was that this is not first priority, however there is a need for a better collaboration with the business department. In (Kofteros)'s view, entrepreneurial (skills) courses should be implemented in all curricula, but even better already from kindergarten, since 90% of graduates have no clue about business and entrepreneurship (from various backgrounds, such as literature, etc), danger of unemployability/unemployment

A major concern in relation to these entrepreneurial courses relies in the actual number of efforts and projects that are turned into commercialized products (Papadopoulos). However, there are certainly a number of commercialized EU project results but number is not known. The fact is that very often the end of EU funding means also the end of the effort. Now EU policies are being changed in that regard (Peroulakis).

Furthermore, the skills that are required by employers from graduates are: analytical thinking, ability to collaborate, fundamental knowledge and ability to work in a global environment. The most important output of the projects are the people who have been trained by the participation in these projects. These people have learned how to work in a international/global environment and the (internal) policies should enable those trained people to do their own projects. Thus, the training by EU projects is very useful and precious (Dikaiakos).

However, no matter what the professional background is (artist, scientist, entrepreneur, etc.) the goal is always the same: to create imagination, to be able to tell a story better than the old existing) one or a new story. We must think How many instructors of entrepreneurship have actually practical experience! Perhaps, what is actually needed is leading examples/ best cases so people can follow and also, high research quality and exposure will attract interest and money (Georgiou).

Finally, in regards to this question, a critical element to consider is intellectual property protection in Cyprus – for which the legislation is not very clear. It is also important to combine existing technologies in regard of providing design etc., (would be good to have an SME to provide this). For example, in the past, companies such as P&G have sent their people to conferences to exchange know-how, now it is too expensive and things are obtained one online via website.

SIXTH QUESTION: How can we (industry) enhance the cooperation with academia and what are the barriers?

Some of the identified main barriers are: language barriers (academia and business speak different language which leads to communication problems), bureaucracy, industry does not have incentives to cooperate with academia, general incompatibility, and universities lack the right competent person to meet SMEs (not good enough to have a master student there). One of the most important thing that I have not learnt in my university studies and I needed in my entrepreneurial career was “Thinking out of the box” – which is a critical barrier (if missing). Also, tax incentives are needed for SMEs to collaborate with academia and liaison offices at universities need to employ better qualified people to do the job - who understand also the market and industry, not a student – (Parisis).

A good example refers to the provost of Stanford University who brought entrepreneurs from outside to the university to start create the entrepreneurial spirit within the university. Leadership, championship is needed. Social entrepreneurship is also a growing trend (Landsdale).

A good such strategy involves first accomplishing the hiring needs of SMEs which are developers and creative people. Developers move forward product development, Creative people help the company move faster as they can convey the message faster. Digital skills are also needed - at the same time there is a high unemployment rate of academics, this is contradictory (Kofteros). There are skilled IT graduates in Cyprus, but the difficulty for SME is to overcome competition to access other markets (Dikaiakos).

SEVENTH QUESTION: What does employability and entrepreneurship mean would you say are the biggest barriers when trying to cooperate with academia?

You cannot teach entrepreneurship but you can teach entrepreneurial skills and soft skills, critical thinking, how to discover opportunities. You should encourage students/academics rather than forcing them to adopt entrepreneurial attitude. You should empower people to meet market needs (Vorley). Also, for a startup community grass root movements and civic society need to be important supportive factors (Kofteros).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main outcome of this roundtable discussion is the fact that the entire triple helix ecosystem (university, industry, government) has to evolve and adapt together in order to properly achieve the co-creation stage by investing in excellence. The government should function as an enabler to give incentives for the involved stakeholders so that we can facilitate academic-business collaboration. Furthermore, there is a need to answer SME (98% of Cyprus's businesses) problems but there is a lack of communication between academia and SMEs and there should be coaching provided for all departments on how to commercialize research. Also, the general view of the panelists was that triple helix collaboration is a necessity for receiving funding by achieving a balance between basic research and industry funded research. Entrepreneurialism and creativity is important in each triple helix entity and the needs of SMEs must be carefully listened to.

Good academics are necessary, good entrepreneurial academics are also necessary but often, this collaboration is diminished by bureaucracy and overall framework and mentality. Right channeling is needed for a good idea and for matching a business with academia. Overall, we need companies to create this interaction between industry and academia. Cyprus does not have it. It is a small market, mostly SMEs, therefore we need to look outside of Cyprus. In any case, entrepreneurial courses (including intellectual property management) and the related commercialization skills are highly necessary. However, entrepreneurship cannot be thought, but you can teach entrepreneurial skills and soft skills, critical thinking, how to discover opportunities. Students and academics should be encouraged rather than forced to adopt entrepreneurial attitude. People should be empowered to meet market needs and to achieve excellence.

Final statement for all panelists:

INVEST in EXCELLENCE!

Photos from the event



Media Coverage of the event

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RIK - radio http://www.cs.ucy.ac.cy/~george/RIK_r.mp3

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